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REMARKS

OF

HON. EDWARD O. WOLCOTT,
OF COLORADO,

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

FRIDAY, APRIL 15, 1898.

WASHINGTON.

1898.

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REMARKS
OF
HON. EDWARD O. WOLCOTT.

The Senate having under consideration the joint resolution (S. R. 149) for the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the President of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect—

Mr. WOLCOTT said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: It had not been my intention to participate in the slightest degree in this debate until some of the reflections upon the Chief Executive of this nation were uttered yesterday; and they have led me, in view of the fact that I intend now to vote for the joint resolution of the Committee on Foreign Relations, to desire to publicly disassociate myself utterly and wholly from any of those discreditable insinuations.

In my opinion, Mr. President, the great mass of the people of this nation do not desire war, if they can avoid it; but they see no way how, under the providence of God, it may be averted. The people of these United States have stood and stand to-day loyally by the President. His position, frictional and difficult at best, has been administered by him as became an incumbent of that high office. Brave himself, he abhors war; but he abhors unrighteousness more. He has dealt in most courageous fashion with that popular clamor which would have been so easy for him to follow—a popular clamor natural and patriotic and loyal, but necessarily uninformed and unreasoning. He has been compelled to contend with the disgraceful conduct and utterances of a degraded journalism which has, I regret to say, found influence among those in high station—a journalism which would cheerfully and gladly plunge this country into war to-morrow if it could increase its circulation a few copies.

He has had to contend with the impassioned utterances which have taken place in both Houses of Congress; utterances, Mr. President, which we have no right to criticise. The Senate is an open forum where every man is responsible only to his conscience for what he says, and if his utterances make the task of diplomacy more difficult, we must accept it as one of the features of our institutions, and we must seek to be so strong in other directions that we can overcome the evils which may grow from them.

All these influences in these long and arduous and trying and difficult days the President of the United States has met with that splendid conservatism which comes to all good men when responsibility and power are imposed upon them. He has met them not alone with the courage of a man who has known the smoke of battle, but he has met them with the fortitude and courage of the Christian who desires to save, if possible, the lives of every American committed to his charge; and, Mr. President, that confidence and that affection and that respect have been reflected for weeks in the forbearance and tolerance and courtesy of this body throughout all these trying weeks.

If there have been one or two discordant notes; if, as we stand on the threshold of war, which we have practically already crossed, there has been heard among the Senators in this Chamber a reflection upon the character and motives of him who is the beloved President of our whole people and whom the Constitution creates the Commander in Chief of our armies and our navies, it will only serve to emphasize and deepen the practical unanimity with which all good men look up to the President and the desire we all cherish in this awful crisis to strengthen his hand.

After weeks of diplomacy, unfortunately unsuccessful, the President turned over to Congress the two subjects which he had been considering—the subject of the barbarities in Cuba and of the disaster to our battle ship. It is a great pity that he could not longer have kept them; but the avenues of diplomacy were closed to him. It is a pity, because under our institutions and under our procedure Congress deals with these questions as men in mass meeting. The finesse of diplomacy is unknown to us. We can speak only from our hearts and for the people we represent; and our debates, which may prejudice us in the minds of the people of Europe, are the

essential and the necessary channel through which, as representatives of the people, we make known our views when public duty is devolved upon us.

If the two subjects could have been presented separately, if they had occurred separately, we might perhaps have saved the necessity of war. If the awful barbarities in Cuba, extending over three years, which have aroused the sensibilities and the pity of all mankind, could have stood alone, it is possible, though not probable, that by peaceful methods we could have met a solution of this difficulty.

For myself, Mr. President, however much of expenditure or debt or outlay it might have entailed, I would far rather have voted right and left and mortgaged the property, and thus necessarily mortgaged the labor, of every citizen of the United States to a reasonable extent if that would have secured peace in Cuba. It might have been successfully accomplished, although it seems as if Spain would not, and could not, yield that which is the essential condition of our ceasing our insistence.

But, Mr. President, when added to that there came the awful explosion in the harbor of Havana, a friendly port, in time of peace, the die was cast. After that, what could be said? If that had stood alone, it is possible it might have been adjusted without war, but not by any method which the Spaniard has yet attempted. When such an outrage was committed there was but one duty left, and that was the duty of exculpation, if they could exculpate themselves. If not, the only course of a self-respecting people must be to invoke the god of battle.

Mr. President, from the day of that awful disaster until now, except the most perfunctory regrets, the most formal messages to our Government and our people, there have been no steps taken either to exculpate Spain or to fix the guilt of the offenders. Mr. President, taking the two happenings together, what can result but war?

For the disaster to our battle ship we want no money. There is nothing that can repair our wrong. Yes; one thing. If Spain would free Cuba to-day, we would offer up our 260 sailors as an offering upon the altar of Cuban freedom.

But, Mr. President, because of that disaster unatoned for and

unexplained, the determination is burned into the hearts of the American people that war must come or Cuba be made free and independent. No other answer will be accepted.

Mr. President, this national honor which we evoke is intangible, it is inchoate, it is unwritten and unexpressed, but it has within it the force and the violence of the whirlwind and the storm. It is "that chastity of honor which feels a stain like a wound." The existence of it makes nations survive and fit to live. The loss of it, or the trading upon it, or the abandonment of it, makes nations fit to die and perish from the face of the earth.

It is for these reasons, Mr. President, that good men, hating war and loving peace, can see no way under heaven whereby war may now be avoided. At the outset it is fitting for us in advance to pledge ourselves that the statements we make to Europe and to mankind are true—that this is a war for liberty, for humanity, and for the succor of the suffering and the oppressed.

Personally, Mr. President, I regret that I can not find in the Cuban situation an independent government such as I can vote to recognize. I wish I could. For when the time of final adjustment shall come there is danger in these days of syndicates and commercialism and reorganizations that there will be found the men who play and trade on human liberties as they do on loans and chattels, who will seek either to aggrandize this property for the national uses at a price, or seek to syndicate it in some form whereby commissions may be realized. To-day we stand approved in the minds of every humane man in Europe because we stand for humanity and liberty. And there we must stand till the end and after the end, if we would win their respect and preserve our own.

Mr. President, when the day of final settlement comes and the issue has been finally closed, we must still stand as a nation, strong, self-centered, and humane, which heard the appeal of the suffering across the shallow waters of the Gulf and could not turn a deaf ear to the cry of the oppressed and the downtrodden. There is nothing nobler at the close of the nineteenth century than a great country, with everything to sacrifice and nothing to gain, standing up for human liberty and the relief of suffering. No

concert of Europe chokes our utterance or strangles our voice. As a free people we can listen to their cries and heed them. And, Mr. President, serious as is this crisis, and great as are the dangers that grow out of the steps which we have taken, I am unwilling to believe that the claim will ever hereafter be made in the Senate or elsewhere that, having expended our blood and treasure for the sake of a suffering people, we should seize their fertile lands and annex them to our own as a recompense.

It has been said upon the floor of the Senate, and it has been heard much elsewhere of late, that unless a nation fights it decays and deteriorates; that—

Honor sinks where commerce long prevails; that it is essential to the race that it raise its young on wars, or else it goes to decay. If that is true—and I do not believe it—it is a pitiful statement to follow two thousand years of the teachings of Christ; and if it is true, it applies to a contest with equals.

Spain has a population of 16,000,000 of people and we have nearly 75,000,000. For three years Spain has drained her resources in men and money to the same extent as if we in three years had sent a million men, who had never come back, and a billion dollars in money to a colony 3,000 miles from the United States. This is the country upon which we are asked to whet our courage. It is as if we kicked a cripple whose crutch might hurt us until we took it away and invoked upon ourselves the plaudits of the world as a people of bravery and of daring.

Mr. President, we have heard on the floor of this House again and again denunciation of the Spaniards as cowards. From Alva and "stout Cortez" until to-day the Spaniard has been brutal in conduct, but courageous and brave. When we enter upon this war we do not want to befool ourselves either with the idea that we are fighting cowards or a foe our equal in numbers and resources.

No, Mr. President, this war is one which can bring us no material gain. It will bring us the loss of millions of dollars in our commerce. It will sweep our ships from the seas. It will create unrest in business. It will destroy industries. It will be followed by that lessening in morality which always accompanies the conclusion of a war. We will leave thousands of our young men

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dead of fever or by the bullet in the tropics in the Island of Cuba, and we shall be fortunate if we are not compelled to face serious complications with other European countries.

All these things we must count in advance, and we have counted them. And when the day of the result shall come and Cuba is free, as we must make her free, we will have fought a country which can never indemnify us by land, for we want no land beyond our border; a country which can never indemnify us in money, for she has got no money. We must find our only satisfaction, and it must be the supreme satisfaction of a free people, in this, that we have poured out our blood and our treasures to relieve the cry of suffering humanity.

The war which is already upon us, whatever the phraseology of our resolutions, must be fought because it is the manifest destiny of this Republic to stand forever upon the Western Hemisphere a sentinel of liberty. It must come, because if we fail to listen to the voice of the suffering or the cry of the downtrodden upon this continent, we shall be untrue to those principles of liberty, humanity, and Christianity upon which this country is founded as upon a rock. [Applause in the galleries.]

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